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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREF HR SR

SUBJECT: APPLICATIONS FOR FY2003 AMBASSADOR'S FUND FOR  
REFUGEES

REF: STATE 66319

SUMMARY

11. We are pleased to submit two applications to PRM's Ambassador's Refugee Fund Program aimed at providing support to refugee communities. The first request is to provide resource support (totaling about 7,000 USD) to a community center and primary school in Centingrad, a town with a sizeable Muslim population, many of whom are returnees to Croatia. The second request is to provide various types of medical/surgical equipment to Knin hospital (totaling about 13,000 USD), which provides important medical services to thousands of refugees who have returned to the area. We have visited the community center and school in Centingrad, which is currently under construction by a joint team of U.S. and Croatian military officers and the Knin hospital in recent weeks. An Embassy panel, chaired by the DCM, determined that these projects, out of a list of twelve, were the ones where PRM funds would have the greatest impact on refugee returns and the community at large. End Summary.

Panel Selects Projects for PRM Program

12. Following extensive research on a dozen projects submitted for consideration for PRM's Ambassador's Fund Program, the DCM recently convened a panel to review the list of proposed projects and to make final selections. Panel members agreed that supporting the projects in the town of Centingrad and in the city of Knin would yield the most benefit. Both are projects that will benefit refugee populations and the entire community at large. They will continue to support reconciliation efforts that are underway. In addition, both are very specific in nature and will require little effort with implementation. Post has reviewed and confirmed the estimated prices of the equipment that has been requested, and is confident that the prices will fit within the \$20,000 cap set by PRM. Post will play a direct role in overseeing the purchases and delivery of the requested items. Background material on each project is provided below.

A Muslim Community in Croatia

13. The town of Centingrad is located about two hours from Zagreb by car. The town, which consisted of 4,800 residents prior to the war and had an ethnic makeup of 66 percent Croat, 25 percent Serb, and 9 percent Muslim, was heavily damaged. Since 1998, refugee returns to the town have increased as more houses are being reconstructed and infrastructure is repaired. The population now stands at about 2,500, with Croats making up 78 percent of the population, and Serbs and Muslims the balance. Muslims are now the second largest ethnic group due to an increase in returns. The town has received very little support from the Croatian Government. It has one of the largest Muslim communities in Croatia.

14. We recently met with the local Imam, Azim Durmic, and the president of the school, Matija Stepic, who told us that the two most important needs for the community were at the primary school and community center. The school in Centingrad had been completely destroyed, forcing many of the town's almost fifty children to travel some fifteen miles to attend school in a neighboring municipality. But help is on the way, primarily due to assistance from the United States. The Imam boasted about the fact that USAID is providing some assistance helping to restore electricity, and U.S. and Croatian military personnel were currently reconstructing the primary school. Construction will be completed by August 1.

15. Stepic told us that the school will need about 100 compulsory school literature books, 3-4 computers, a television, videocassette recorder, and sports equipment for outdoor sports before it opens. USG assistance with the above-mentioned items would be appreciated. We later visited the construction site of the school and spoke with the U.S. military commander in charge of the project who confirmed the

timeframe for completion. The estimated cost of providing the items the school requested is \$6,000.

16. As for the community center, Imam Duric explained that it is a place where all of the citizens gather to read or complete paperwork for citizenship papers or to apply for various types of social assistance. Based in a three-storied house, we noticed that the community center is indeed the gathering place for adults and children. The Imam said that because of the various roles the community center plays, it

would be useful for it to have a medium-sized copier to complete various types of paperwork and a television and videocassette recorder so that the children could watch various educational and other shows during summer months and after school. The estimated cost of these items is approximately \$1,000.

Knin Hospital In Need of Help

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17. The city of Knin was the capital of the so-called &Serb Krajina<sup>8</sup> prior to the war. During this period, Knin had a predominantly Serb population and its hospital was considered one of the best in Croatia. However, the effects of the war and the virtual neglect by the Croatian government since the war have taken a severe toll on the hospital's operations over the past eight years. Although the ethnic balance in Knin has changed (it is now roughly 65 percent Croat and 35 percent Serb after a significant infusion of Bosnian Croats who were resettled in the region after Serbs fled their homes), many Serbs are returning to Knin and the hospital continues to provide services to all of Knin's citizens.

18. We traveled to Knin to meet with the manager of the hospital, Anka Shihabi. She told us that the hospital was built twenty years ago and equipped to provide medical services to 350 patients. The hospital's medical equipment, infrastructure, and information technology was heavily destroyed during the war. There are four main departments -- medical, surgical, gynecological, and pediatric -- currently operating at the hospital. The hospital currently has 140 employees, including many Serbs, and has almost 100 patients. In the gynecology department, over 300 women, many of whom are returning refugees, from Knin give birth per year. Other refugees receive critical services including minor and major surgery, from the hospital daily even though they are not able to pay.

19. Shihabi told us that the Knin hospital continues to be one of the most important preconditions for sustainable return and living in the Knin area. This is because the hospital also provides services to refugees in several other municipalities outside Knin. The next closest hospital is located almost an hour away in Sibenik. Shihabi indicated that the hospital was in dire need of basic medical equipment needed to perform various types of surgical procedures. She provided us with a list of about 40 pieces of equipment ranging from various types of tweezers and scissors to different types of scalpels. She had received estimates for the equipment, which totaled about \$13,000. Providing this equipment would allow the hospital to continue to provide services to all of Knin's residents. She noted that these items were the most pressing need for the hospital and appealed to the U.S. for help.

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